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Sermon on Rom. 1, 16.

Whatever strange nations, peoples, or tribes, travelers and discoverers have found on this earth, they have never met with a people entirely devoid of religion. No people, however low may be its state of culture, has sunk so low as to live without any religious forms or ceremonies and ideas. Some have used this as an argument against sending missionaries to the heathen. They have said: "Why send these people religious teachers? They have a religion of their own. Let them have their own religion, and do not disturb them. They are satisfied with their own religion." People who talk in that way mistake our purpose; we do not send missionaries to spread any kind of religious thoughts, our purpose is to spread the *one*, the *only*, the *true* religion, the *Christian* religion. Let no one suppose that it is sufficient for a man to have "a religion," no matter what it be. Will anyone dare to contend that a religion which teaches parents to throw their children into the fire or into the river is a blessing? Let us keep in mind that the "religion" of the heathen is in many cases the greatest curse which afflicts these nations. In fact, there is but one religion which is a real blessing to man, that is the *Christian* religion. The Christian religion is as far superior to every other religion as heaven is superior to hell. Let us consider this truth at some length. To this end I will point out to you from our text,—

THE MATCHLESS GLORY OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION.

We see this in:

- I. *Its incontestable authority;*
- II. *Its supreme joy;*
- III. *Its saving power.*

I.

Here in our text, St. Paul, the greatest of the apostles, declares : *"I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek."* In this declaration St. Paul mentions the three things which stamp the Christian religion the only true religion. In the first place he speaks of it as the Gospel of *Christ*, that is to say, a gospel which St. Paul did not receive of man, and which was not taught by men, but which he received of Jesus Christ, Gal. 1, 12. This Gospel, this religion is not one which men have invented, nor is it proclaimed upon the authority of the "best scholars," neither is it a religion which the wisest men have discovered after long study and research, much less is it the product of a fanatic's dream or the result of a fool's meditation. It is nothing less than a religion taught by *God Himself*. The Christian religion therefore is of *incontestable authority*, for it is the revelation of God Himself brought to us by no one less than Christ, the only-begotten Son of the Almighty. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him." All other religions are the inventions of men who have endeavored to supply man with something to satisfy his guilty conscience and slavish dread of an unknown God. Such endeavor has been mere guesswork, a groping in the dark; for "who hath known the mind of the Lord?" If it is true (as it certainly is) that no man knows what may be the thoughts of a man sitting next to him, how much more certainly true is it that no man knows the mind of the Lord except the Lord Himself, 1 Cor. 2, 11. In order to discover the truth about God and God's mind and disposition toward us, we must have God Himself speak to us. And O, praised be His kindness! He has done this through the eternal Word, the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of His Father, and has by inspired prophets, apostles, evangelists, yea, in His own person made known to us the very secrets of God's bosom, the thoughts of God's heart. That is the Gospel of *Christ*, which is spoken not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth. That is the Christian religion, the only true religion, and of *incontestable authority*, because by it God Himself speaks to us of Himself, reveals to us His will, and makes known to us His disposition toward us. Indeed, neither St. Paul nor we, nor any man need be ashamed of this Gospel, for it is *God's Gospel*, *God's wisdom*, *God's word and teaching*. Whereas all other religions are ridiculous superstitions, the Christian religion is the revelation of *God* from heaven, it is the Gospel of *Christ*.

II.

But its incontestable authority is not the only advantage of the Christian religion. Besides being purest truth it is a message of *supreme joy*. Herein again it differs from all other religions. All other religions also try to show man a way to God—to peace with God. But what do they point out to man as a way by which he may find peace with God? They tell man: “You must appease God’s wrath, He is angry with you because you have offended Him by your disobedience.” Now they may differ as to what kind of work or sacrifice they advise man to make, but they all agree in this, that they urge man to do something, and to sacrifice something whereby man is to make up for his sin and change God’s sentiments toward him. Some advise tedious religious ceremonies, others, painful flagellations, fastings, watchings, denial of natural wants, sacrifice of money, or of children, or of one’s own life. If time would permit, horrible incidents could be related how these false religions drive man to commit the most unnatural crimes and practice the most ridiculous folly in order to pacify the anger of their god. The more devoted any heathen is to his religion, the more of a fool and slave of deceivers he becomes. Think of the sad plight of the poor sinner when seeking help in such a false religion. He is already in the greatest misery because of his sin, and these false teachers, instead of showing him how to be saved from his torture and wretchedness, only load upon him greater burdens and drive him deeper and deeper into folly or despair. The Christian religion, on the other hand, is *Gospel*, that is, “*glad tidings of great joy which shall be to all people*.” St. Paul here in our text calls the Christian religion *Gospel*: “I am not ashamed of the *Gospel* of Christ.” *Gospel* means *good news*. What is this good news? It is a message from God to the poor troubled, miserable sinner which tells him: “Fear not, don’t worry any longer, don’t fret, don’t tremble at the thought of God. God loves you, yes, you sinner, and He has forgiven you all your sins. You need do nothing to win His favor and to make up for your sins. Jesus Christ has already done that, He has made up and paid for all your sins not by paying for them gold or silver, but by suffering and shedding for you His precious holy and divine blood. God is long ago reconciled to you, He does not hate you, He does not intend to strike you, He loves and pardons you. Here is His pardon from heaven; believe it, accept it. Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.”

My friends, that is the best news ever heard on this earth. The Christian religion does not bring us greater burdens than we already have, it comes to us to relieve us of our burdens. ’Tis true, we also

hear the Law of God in our churches, and we speak of God's anger against sin, but that is only a work of preparation for the message of God's love and forgiveness, the *Gospel* of Christ. The real, central, and all-pervading theme and contents of every truly *Christian* sermon is this best of all news, the pardoning love of a merciful God and a Savior from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. O blessed men who hear and believe this joyful message from their God! Such believers will "rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." They will sing the praises of Him that has called them out of darkness into His marvelous light, who has given them the oil of gladness for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. They have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, and they sing:

How sweet is the Gospel! It comes from above
To speak of the wonders of heavenly love.
Deserving of wrath, here mercy I see,
For Jesus was punished—*instead of me.*

III.

Can we say anything more for the Christian religion? St. Paul mentions another thing—its *saving power*. It is "the *power of God unto salvation* to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." To know what effect the Christian religion has upon those who receive it, you need only look upon and compare the heathen and the Christian. Superstition of the vilest sort, immorality, slavish fear, and vice have been and are to this day very often part of false religions. Instead of lifting man up they degrade those who embrace them, and often pervert even that little natural sense of decency, justice, and honor which their own natural depravity has allowed to remain. Who does not know of the heartless, cold greed of the Jew? the merciless and fiendish cruelty of many tribes given up to cannibalism and human sacrifices? the treachery, deceit, and spirit of lies that rules the heathen Chinese? the self-righteous pride of the Mohammedan and Hindoo? That is the effect of a religion which teaches man to gain favor with God by his own efforts. What does the free Gospel of forgiveness produce in man? "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Certainly, in a so-called Christian country we still find legions who live in vice and superstition and serve Satan, but—not all inhabitants of so-called Christian lands are really Christians. Those, however, whom the Holy Ghost has enabled to say that Jesus is their Lord crucify the flesh with its lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, showing forth a heavenly conversation.

'Tis true, the Christian, even the best Christian, remains a sinner and daily sins much; indeed, he may even fall into great and disgraceful sins. But he does not live willingly in sin, he is not a slave of any iniquity. A Christian hates sin, and the Gospel gives him power to fight against and conquer all sins. A sober man may stumble or slip and fall into the mire, but he will not lie in the mire like a besotted drunkard. The Gospel of Christ, the Christian religion, gives its believers the faith that is the victory which overcometh the world, — the world's doubts, the world's sin, the world's sorrows and trials, — and saves us unto the uttermost, where, after a joyful resurrection, we rejoice in an eternal victory, in perfect righteousness, innocence, and blessedness with Christ in heaven. What was it that saved Moses in Egypt from the snares of a cruel and profligate court and made him a faithful servant of God? It was faith in the Messiah, the Christ. *"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."* Is not the history of the Christian Church full of illustrious names whom the Gospel of Christ saved, sinners of whom the Word of God made saints? "The time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah, of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets; who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." Was not this very Paul who writes this text saved by the Gospel of Christ from being a murderous persecutor of pious men and women and made a devout, patient, untiring, self-sacrificing servant of the Lord of righteousness? Are there not this very hour those here present who could say: "Aye, and this same Gospel has been a power to us of salvation"? Indeed, wherever this Gospel is believed it changes man from an enemy of God and a slave of sin to a friend of God and a conqueror of vice and iniquity, from a servant of unrighteousness to a servant of righteousness. It is true, — thousands of years of testing substantiate and verify the statement, — the Gospel of Christ, the Christian religion, is a power unto salvation to *everyone* that believeth, be he Jew or Gentile. —

We have seen now, my dear hearers, that the Christian religion is purest truth, of incontestable authority, for it is spoken and taught by God Himself. It is the message of sweetest joy, for it tells us that the almighty Ruler of all things forgives our sins and

loves us with an everlasting love. It is a power to save, for it gives us strength to meet every foe and to conquer sin, death, and the devil. Tell me, do you believe and trust this Gospel as *God's Word*? Do you rejoice in it as the message of your forgiveness? Has it given you the power to fight against and conquer sin and temptation? If so, then you will joyfully join St. Paul in saying: "*I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation.*" But if you have till now tasted nothing of its sweet truth and saving power, then believe the message now, and it will also prove to you, whoever you be, the *power of God to salvation*. Let nothing prevent you — believe, fear not; only believe and be saved.

Delay not, delay not, O sinner, draw near,
The waters of life are flowing for thee;
No price is demanded; the Savior is here,
Redemption is purchased, salvation is free.

Amen.

M. S. S.

Anniversary Sermon.

Ps. 103, 1. 2.

Whenever God opens a door for the entrance of His Word; whenever He sends the bright beams of the light of His Gospel to dispel the darkness of doubt and unbelief; whenever the waters of life which flow from the fountain of living water in the Scriptures are made to run over the parched ground of the hearts of sad and sinful men: then God visits the people of His choice with His salvation, then the accepted time and the day of salvation dawns, then the cry is heard: "Say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!" and the Advent promise receives an ever new fulfillment: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee!"

And whenever the Lord continues His gracious visitation; whenever He abides with His believers, together with the gifts of His grace: forgiveness of sins, peace, joy, and salvation; whenever, for a quarter of a century, He remains the Father of His children, the Shepherd of His flock, the Guardian and Protector of our souls: then the people of God ought to bow their heads in humble and thankful adoration and ought to exclaim with one accord in hymns of praise and thanksgiving: "O give thanks unto the Lord; for He is good: for His mercy endureth forever."

My friends, in enumerating the greatest blessings which the Lord can bestow upon sinful man, namely, His Word, and the establishment, upbuilding, and maintenance of the Church of Christ, His Son, I have enumerated the blessings which the Lord has showered upon you abundantly in the past twenty-five years. And while showing you that Christians have good cause for exceeding great joy when they meditate the goodness of the Lord upon them, I have shown you, too, that joy and gratitude ought to fill your hearts and mouths to-day, when you recount and review the manifold blessings of the Lord which you have enjoyed in His house in this place. Therefore let us sing the praises of the Lord, let us come before His face with gladness, and into His tabernacle with rejoicing; let us cry out: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Let this, then, be the exhortation with which I desire to approach you on this twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of your church:

**"BLESS THE LORD, O MY SOUL: AND ALL THAT IS WITHIN ME,
BLESS HIS HOLY NAME."**

- I. *The benefits of the Lord are many and great.*
- II. *Therefore, forget not, O my soul, all His benefits.*

I.

David sings in our Psalm: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name." King David's heart was filled with praise, as this whole Psalm shows, this Psalm being perhaps the sweetest and most perfect hymn of praise in the Bible. King David had good cause to be thankful. Wonderfully the Lord had led him. From the fields of Bethlehem, where he had tended the flocks of his father, the Lord had called him to be king of Israel, mighty among the rulers of the earth. Oftentimes the Lord had preserved him in the hour of danger; oftentimes He had given him brilliant victories over his foes. And when the king had committed the grievous sins of murder and adultery, the Lord sent the prophet Nathan to him with the word of forgiveness and pardon. Remindful of these mercies of the Lord, David exclaimed: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies." Now when the Lord had given David peace round about from all his enemies, the king did not do as many ungrateful people before and after his time have done. He did not forget

the Lord whose kindness had been ever new and fresh upon him as the dews of the morning, but bowed his head in grateful prayer and praise, acknowledging that, if the Lord had not been with him to bless, to exalt, and to protect him, he would never have become a king, but in all probability would have remained a lowly shepherd upon the fields of Bethlehem.

My friends, let us learn from David's example which the benefits are that the Lord has showered upon you, and in what manner you ought to remember His benefits. You are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of your church. What do twenty-five years of Lutheran church-life signify? They signify that, for twenty-five years, the pure and unadulterated Word of God in its truth and purity, its force and sweetness, has been proclaimed in your midst; that the trumpet of the Gospel has sounded in pure, full, and sweet tones; that the cry has gone out: "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" that the message of salvation has been carried into your hearts and homes: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It signifies, in short, that the sum and substance, yea, the very kernel of divine truth has been preached to you Sunday after Sunday, namely, the doctrine, that we poor sinners are justified before God and saved for the kingdom of heaven, not by any works which we may have done or may do, but solely by the grace of God through faith in the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

My friends, this is a great benefit; in fact, a greater benefit and blessing the Lord could not bestow upon you. For which is the first benefit mentioned by David in our Psalm? Listen: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy soul from destruction." The paramount question in the hearts of all men ought to be: "What must I do to be saved? How can I be healed from the disease of sin? How shall I be able to escape the wrath to come?" And this question has been answered here for twenty-five years to your eternal satisfaction and peace: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Here the servants of Christ have called for a quarter of a century: "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." Here the Savior has beckoned year after year with His sweet voice: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Here little children have been brought

in baptism to Christ to be accepted into His kingdom of love and grace. Here the lambs of the fold of Christ have been gathered in the arms of the Savior and carried in His gentle bosom through all their childhood years, while the servants of the Good Shepherd instructed them in the parish school in the way in which they should walk. Here the adult Christians have received strength in the Word of God to fight the good battle of faith against sin and temptation, Satan and the world. And when they grew faint upon the field of battle, they were revived and prepared for new fights and conquests by partaking of the Savior's own body and blood in the Sacrament, given and shed for them for the remission of sins. Here many Christian youths and maidens renewed their baptismal vow of faith, discipleship, and constancy unto the end on each recurring day of Confirmation. Here many a Christian bride and bridegroom plighted the troth and received God's blessing for their united journey through life. Here many a Christian pilgrim has been laid to rest with Christian burial rites, to sleep the sleep of the just until God shall awaken him to glory on the last day.

Now when we remember that the Lutheran church is the only church in this country which holds fast to the very letter of the Word of God; the only church in which the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of the Gospel of Christ is preached; the only church in which all glory is given to God and in which all sinners are thrown upon the mercy of Christ and taught to clothe their naked sinfulness, not with the filthy cloak of their own righteousness, but with the cloak of that righteousness which Christ purchased for us with His holy and precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death; and when you remember, my friends, that you belong to this Lutheran church which has been blessed so signally and so fully by Christ: then your eyes will be opened to see the benefits of the Lord upon you, then you will acknowledge that you have good cause to bless the Lord to-day. For you belong to the true visible Church of Christ on earth. While in other churches in which false doctrines are taught, which remain not in all things steadfastly in the truth, the chances to be lost by error are as great as the chances to be saved by what truth is still taught in those churches, there is, in the Lutheran church, no possibility for a Christian to lose the crown of life eternal, as long as he accepts and holds fast with the hand of faith the teachings of the Lutheran church, which teachings are nothing more nor less than the teachings of the Word of God. Am I using strong and boastful words? My friends, I invite you to test our Lutheran doctrines, one and all, by the infallible rule and norm laid down in Holy Writ, and to see

for yourselves that the teachings of our church which, for four hundred years, have withstood successfully the onslaughts of enemies and errorists are in this day and in this church as firmly rooted and as surely established as the Word of God itself. For the teachings of the Lutheran church are from beginning to end the Word of God. This is not man's doing, but solely God's grace. Therefore "he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Indeed, abundant have been the benefits of the Lord upon you; abundant also ought to be the thanks which you give Him to-day and always.

II.

The Psalmist exclaims: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." With these words we are exhorted not to forget the mercies of the Lord, but gratefully to remember them. In what manner may we remember the goodness of the Lord? The Psalmist says: "*Bless the Lord, O my soul.*" Our first offering to-day ought to be the offering of *thanks*. Common decency requires us to be thankful. When we receive a gift, when anybody does us the slightest favor, we say: "I thank you." The person who forgets or neglects to show gratitude is looked upon as rude and unmanly. Now if we give thanks to our fellow-men for small gifts and favors, how much more ought we to render thanks unto God for His benefits which are not small and insignificant, but so great and far-reaching as to extend over a period of twenty-five years and into our very hearts and souls, as to have a value, not only for the short time of this life, but also for eternity! If we do not thank our fellow-men, we cannot expect any favors from them in future. If we do not thank God, we have no right to expect any more blessings from Him. Therefore forget not, O my soul, all His benefits.

David says: "Bless the Lord, O my *soul*." All sincere gratitude is rooted in the heart. The man who thanks God only with his lips, but not also with his soul, is a hypocrite. Of such hypocrites the Lord says: "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me." And Christ condemns these hypocrites, saying: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord! shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." That praise alone is acceptable unto God, and rises into the nostrils of the Lord as a sweet incense, which is heartfelt. And he alone thanks God properly who in all sincerity says: "Bless the Lord, O my *soul*." But before the offering of thanks can be given, the petition must ascend to the throne of God: "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within

me. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer." Thus, my friends, if your hearts are purified and sanctified by faith and prayer, you will be in the right mood to thank God, then your meditation of the Lord will be sweet, and you will be glad in the Lord.

Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. If your hearts have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, your lips cannot be silent. But even as the heart induces the mouth to praise God, so the lips will exhort the soul in return and will say: "Bless the Lord, O my soul." Then heart and mouth will sing the praises of the bountiful God in unison.

The very best way, however, in which you can remember the benefits of the Lord is that you *continue to enjoy and to make use of the benefits and blessings of the Lord* in the future as you have done in the past. As you sing to-day: "Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thine honor dwelleth," so always add the refrain: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." Though to-day you recall many who have forsaken your church out of a spirit of opposition, or because of the stubbornness of their hearts, or because they loved the verdant fields of sin and shame more than the green pastures and the still waters in the domain of the Good Shepherd; and though, in the future, you see many fall by the wayside to your right and to your left and lose the precious crown of life eternal, let it never be said of you: "This man is a backslider; he had no root. For a while he believed, but in the time of temptation he fell away." So strive to live that every one may see that you appreciate what God has done for you and for your church, that your boast may be: "A day in Thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

May Christ, the Corner-stone and sure Foundation of His Church, keep alive in your hearts true thankfulness for all His benefits which you have received in His church; may He firmly establish you, that the gates of hell may not prevail against you. May He, when your last hour has come, grant you all a peaceful and blessed end and a joyful entrance into His holy and everlasting tabernacle in heaven, where, with all the saints and angels, you will sing His praises forevermore and will shout, world without end: "Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Amen.

Jno. H. V.

Outlines for Sermons on the Gospel-Lessons.

Fifth Sunday after Epiphany.

MATT. 13, 24—30.

Our text contains a parable. A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. Jesus often spoke in parables, Matt. 13, 3. At this time He spoke only in parables, Matt. 13, 34. The purpose of speaking in parables was a threefold one. Thereby the Scriptures were fulfilled, Ps. 78, 2. Matt. 13, 34. (God's Word is true. Jesus is the Messiah.) Thereby the humble believers could more readily grasp divine truths, for unto them it was given to know the mysteries, Matt. 13, 11. Thereby the meaning of Jesus' words was hid from those who would not believe, Luke 8, 10. Is. 6, 9. 10. This chapter contains seven parables. One of the most important and instructive parables is the one in our text. Though we have Jesus' own explanation of this parable, yet this parable has often been misunderstood and misapplied. Let us, with the aid of God's Holy Spirit, endeavor to get at the right meaning and at the right application of our text. Our subject is:

THE TARES AMONG THE WHEAT.

- I. *The field in which they grow;*
- II. *The treatment which they receive.*

I.

Would we understand our Gospel lesson aright, we must know, above all, what is meant by the field in which the tares grow.

a. The field is not the heart. True, there are tares in the heart, *i. e.*, evil desires and wicked thoughts, Matt. 15, 19. Gen. 6, 5; 8, 2. Jer. 17, 9. Experience corroborates this. Examine your heart! Is there not unbelief, pride, envy, jealousy, hatred, covetousness in it? Many of these tares Satan has sown—by suggesting evil thoughts, by kindling unholy desires, etc.: David, 1-Chron. 21, 1; Judas, John 13, 2; Ananias, Acts 5, 3. But though there are tares in the heart, tares sown by Satan, yet Jesus is here not speaking of these, for the field is not the heart.

b. Again, the field is not the Church. True, there are tares, *i. e.*, hypocrites and false Christians, in the visible Church, Matt. 13, 47. 48. History confirms this. Cain, Ham, Ishmael, Esau, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, Achan, Judas, Simon Magus, Ananias, Sapphira, Demas. 1 Cor. 5, 1. 1 John 2, 19. Rev. 2, 14. 15. 20. 1 Thess. 2, 4. So to-day. Where is there a perfectly pure and holy congregation, or church? They who dream of such a one deceive themselves. But although there are tares, *i. e.*, hypocrites and false Christians, in the visible Church, yet Jesus is here not speaking of these, for the field is not the Church.

c. The field is the world, v. 38. In this field, which is Christ's, Ps. 24, 1, Christ (in person and through His ministers, Luke 10, 16) has sown good seed, His Word, v. 19. This seed is sown in all the world, Mark 16, 15. This seed does not return void, but springs up

and brings fruit, wheat, v. 26—converts men, makes them Christians, v. 38. 1 Pet. 1, 23. James 1, 18. *Christ's* work makes men Christians, not their own, v. 24. John 14, 6. Matt. 15, 13. These true Christians, as a sum total, are "the kingdom of heaven," v. 24, the Church of Christ on earth. This invisible Church, though not of the world (John 18, 36), is *in* the world, for the field is the world, v. 38. In this field there are tares among the wheat, unbelievers and wicked people among the Christians. These tares are the children of the devil, v. 38. There is a personal devil, v. 39. He is the declared enemy of Christ, he tries to injure the Church, he is the author of evil. He sows doubt (Eve; Jesus, Matt. 4, 3); false doctrines and heresies, 1 Tim. 4, 1; sinful thoughts and desires, as stated before. Out of this seed develop the tares, the self-righteous and the wicked, v. 33. John 8, 44. The tares, a deleterious grass, a species of darnel, resembled the wheat and was hard to distinguish from it. While growing, the two are so much alike that often the closest scrutiny cannot decide which is which. So children of the world often resemble Christians, live and act like Christians, but are not Christians. These tares Satan sows "while men slept," v. 25, not only when the Christians and the ministers are lukewarm, careless, and indifferent, but especially in the dark, in secret, John 3, 20. These tares Satan sows "among the wheat," v. 25, *i. e.*, in the world where Christ has built His Church. In the world is Christ's kingdom and Satan's kingdom, the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. These two are in the same field. The tares grow where the wheat grows. Believers and unbelievers are intermingled. Even in so-called Christian countries there are tares among the wheat, *i. e.*, false Christians among true Christians, for the field is the world. To which do you belong?—How are these tares to be treated?

II.

a. The wrong treatment. Some suggest to root up the tares, v. 28, *i. e.*, to persecute and slay the hypocrites and false Christians that are in the world. Jesus forbids this treatment, v. 29. This does not mean that we may harbor evil thoughts in our hearts and should not uproot them, Ps. 51, 10; 139, 23. 24. Matt. 5, 8. 28; 9, 4. Nor does this mean that the Church may sow or cultivate tares, or tolerate manifestly wicked and impenitent persons in *its* midst. No; the Church is to discipline such, Matt. 18, 17. 1 Cor. 5, 5. 11—13. 2 Thess. 3, 6. Rom. 16, 17. Titus 3, 10. 2 John 10. 11. But the Church is not to slay the wicked, not to put them out of the world, not to weed them out of *this* field. It is the government's duty, and not the Church's, to punish evildoers, Rom. 13, 4. The Church has only the power of the Word, not that of the sword (Peter, Matt. 26, 51. 52). The Church has no right to exterminate the tares, to destroy men's lives. Christ forbids it, v. 29. Luke 9, 54. 55. If it does, it will root up the wheat also, since the roots of both are entwined.

b. The right treatment. "Let both grow together," v. 30. Though the Christians should come out from among the wicked and be separate from them and reprove their works of darkness, yet

they should let the wicked live. Why? Because Christ commands it, v. 30. Because Christ practiced it, Luke 9, 54—56. Because by this treatment many who erred, or were wicked, were saved, *e. g.*, David, Manasseh, Matthew, the penitent thief, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Samaritans (Acts 8, 5—8). How long is this treatment to last? "Until the harvest," v. 30, till the end of the world, v. 39. Hence there will be no millennium. With all the growth of piety and the expansion of the Church, "evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived," 2 Tim. 3, 13. 1. Is Christianity, then, which is to evangelize the world, a failure? No; for Christ here asserts that on earth there will always be tares among the wheat and no such thing as a converted world.

c. The final treatment. Though in the world the tares are permitted of God to grow among the wheat, yet a final and total separation will take place. In the time of the harvest the tares will be gathered together, bound in bundles, and burned, v. 30. This is the final treatment. The harvest is the end of the world, v. 39. Then the angels shall gather the unbelievers and wicked away from the Church which they surround. Then the pious and the ungodly will no longer be mingled together. Then they will be separated. Yea, more—then the unbelievers and wicked shall be consigned to eternal punishment, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. O awful doom of the wicked! What a warning to those who are not true Christians! And what a comfort to those who now see the tares growing and flourishing! (Ps. 37, 35; 73, 2—17.)

Meanwhile the precious wheat has been gathered into the heavenly garner, and there the righteous shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Though now they sow in tears, then they shall reap in joy. O glorious destiny! 1 John 3, 2.3. O. K.

Sixth Sunday after Epiphany.

MATT. 17, 1—9.

Christ's transfiguration took place on a mount, most likely Mount Tabor. While He was in the state of humiliation Christ thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation and took upon Himself the form of a servant. But even in the state of His humiliation the rays of His divine glory shot forth from Him at times so that men could behold His divine majesty. Christ manifested His divine glory by every miracle which He performed, John 2, 11; He spake as never man spake; He knew the thoughts in men's hearts. By such manifestations men could perceive that Jesus was more than a mortal man, and the conclusion at which they had to arrive was that He must be what He Himself claimed to be, the Son of God. However, at no time and upon no occasion in the state of His humiliation did His divine glory shine forth so brilliantly as in His transfiguration which three of His disciples were permitted to witness. Now as our faith easily receives a shock when we behold Christ in His deepest humiliation, especially in His last suffering, in His seeming helplessness and inability to save Himself, so is our faith strengthened when we behold Him manifesting His divine glory in the state of His humiliation.

OUR FAITH STRENGTHENED BY THE MANIFESTATION OF CHRIST'S GLORY IN HIS TRANSFIGURATION.

- I. *The manifestation of Christ's glory in His transfiguration.*
- II. *How our faith is strengthened by this manifestation.*

I.

The manifestation of Christ's glory in His transfiguration.

a. The witnesses thereof, v. 1. Christ's transfiguration, perhaps, would never have been recorded, had there not been witnesses. Why did He select these three, Peter, James, and John? Doubtless to strengthen their faith and to prepare them for the sight of His deep humiliation which they were soon to behold in the garden of Gethsemane. As they were to behold their Master in His agony and distress, so were they to behold Him now in His glory.

b. The manifestation of this glory, v. 2. What a glorious sight this must have been! There stood Jesus, not merely bathed in light, but shedding forth light from His glorious body. Ps. 104, 2. Dan. 2, 22. 1 Tim. 6, 16. The light shone forth from His face, and even penetrated His raiment, Mark 9, 3. This luster and brilliancy was an indication of His connection with the unseen world, of the Godhead dwelling within Him, Col. 2, 9.

c. The visitants from another world conversing with Him in His glory, v. 3. Moses and Elias appeared "in glory," as Luke informs us. They were the two representatives of the old covenant, Moses of the Law and Elias of the prophets, who came to do homage to the Messiah who was introducing the new covenant. What was the subject upon which they conversed with Christ? Luke 9, 31. The great saints of the old covenant bore their testimony to Christ's fulfillment of what had been prophesied and foreshadowed as to His vicarious suffering and death for the sins of the whole fallen human race.

d. The testimony from heaven enhancing His glory, v. 5. As the Father owned Jesus of Nazareth for His own dear Son when the same was about to enter upon His public ministry, Matt. 3, 17, so did He own Him again and give His testimony from heaven when the same was approaching the close of His public career and about to enter into suffering and death. But this time He added something, "Hear ye Him!" Jesus is the God-appointed Instructor for all the children of men to show them into eternal life, Col. 2, 3. Acts 4, 12.

e. The effect upon the disciples. *α.* Fright seized upon them when they heard the voice from heaven, v. 6. There was something in that voice which paralyzed them with terror. Who can stand before the Almighty when He speaks in His awful majesty? They were frightened because they were sinners. *β.* Different was the effect of the bright shining light which the disciples beheld in and about their beloved Master, v. 4. So pleased were they with their company and surroundings, so overcome with joy, that they desired to remain here for an indefinite time and put up three booths, such as were usually put up at the Feast of the Tabernacles and made of branches and grass. They were in a state of happiness

which they desired to prolong, a most happy feeling had taken possession of their hearts while they beheld their Master's glory, and this state of happiness lasted until the voice from heaven prostrated them to the ground.

II.

How our faith is strengthened by this manifestation.

a. Every doubt as to Christ's divinity is destroyed by Christ's transfiguration; for His transfiguration was not a vision which the disciples had while they were heavy with sleep on the mount, but a reality, a fact which actually occurred. It has been related in all its details by three Evangelists and, besides, Peter refers to it, who was one of the witnesses, 2 Pet. 1, 16—18, and another witness, John, alludes to it, John 1, 14. Can anyone doubt for one moment that Christ is God manifested in the flesh if he believes what the apostles, these trustworthy eye-witnesses, have told us about the manifestation of His glory on the mount?

b. Not less is our faith in His kindness and grace to us strengthened by this manifestation. When the glory of the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, the Israelites were terrified; when Manoah, Samson's father, had seen and conversed with an angel of the Lord, he was so frightened that he thought he would have to die, Judges 13, 22; when the glory of the Lord shone round about the shepherds on the plains of Bethlehem, they were sore afraid. The glory of the Lord generally produced fear and fright and startled those who beheld it. But what a soothing, comforting, pleasing effect did this same divine glory have upon the disciples when they beheld it in Christ! Even when the voice from heaven had prostrated them with fear, it required but a soothing touch from the hand of their beloved Master to restore their former happiness, vv. 7. 8. Now if we consider the fact that no mortal man can stand before the glory of God, and behold how happy the disciples were made by the divine glory exhibited in Christ, must not this strengthen our faith in Christ's kindness and grace to us damnable sinners? Does not His transfiguration show that He does not mean to use His divine power and majesty that He might punish us for our sins, as we deserve, but that He means to be kind and merciful to us? There is nothing in Christ to frighten and terrify us. We are not to regard Him as a stern Judge, but as a kind and merciful Savior, as the Lamb of God and the propitiation for our sins.

c. The manifestation of His glory in His transfiguration must also strengthen our faith in the resurrection of the body and life everlasting. Moses and Elias lived and conversed with Christ. There is a glorious blessed life in the hereafter. Christ's transfigured body plainly shows what kind of bodies we shall have in the resurrection and in that blessed life which is to come. Let this mortal body pass away and crumble into dust, we know that the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, Phil. 3, 21. In heaven, where we shall meet our dear Savior and behold Him face to face, we shall be as happy as the disciples were on the mount of His transfiguration, and behold the glory of our Lord forever and ever. H. S.